

MARC Will Close Little-Used Stops

Plan for Four Stations Draws Protests

By TIM CRAIG

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The Maryland Transit Administration announced yesterday that it is closing four MARC train stations, including two in Montgomery County, because of low ridership and escalating costs.

On March 6, Montgomery's Boyds and Dickerson stations on the Brunswick Line will close. The Jessup station in Howard County and the St. Denis station in Baltimore County, both on the Camden Line, will also stop accepting passengers on that date, the MTA said. The stations served fewer than 50 riders a day combined, state officials said.

The decision by the administration of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) to shut the stations was made despite the opposition of elected officials and residents in the area. The Montgomery County Council unanimously passed a resolution last month opposing the closures, which council members said would worsen traffic problems in the northern tier of the county.

"This only contributes to more traffic congestion on our roads," said David Weaver, a spokesman for Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan, a Democratic candidate for governor.

For weeks, Duncan and other elected officials in Montgomery have joined with residents to fight plans to close the Boyds and Dickerson stations, where trains have been picking up commuters since the 1880s and where roads are clogged with rush-hour commuters.

"I am not sure how, when the state has made no progress on widening Interstate 270, you reduce service on the only transit option that exists in one of the fastest-growing corridors in the state," said council member Michael Knapp (D-Upcounty).

Last week, more than 150 peo-

ple showed up at a public hearing in Barnesville to resist MTA efforts to close the stations.

"People were unified against this," said Lori Goldner, who lives in Boyds.

State Sen. Robert J. Garagiola (D-Montgomery) said yesterday that he may introduce "legislation or budget language" in Annapolis to force the MTA to keep the stations open.

MTA officials said the decision was purely a matter of economics. The combined average daily ridership for the four stations is just 41 commuters, making the stations the least-used in the MARC system, according to MTA officials.

"MARC must put its limited resources where the ridership is," said Maryland Transportation Secretary Robert L. Flanagan. "These four stations simply don't generate the ridership necessary to justify the investment required to keep them operating and safe."

The Jessup station, for example, averaged only one daily rider during the past year, said Cheron Victoria Wicker, an MTA spokeswoman.

The MTA spends \$31,600 a year to run the four stations. Wicker said the state will save several hundred thousand dollars on capital improvements that would have been needed at the stations.

MTA officials noted that each of the four stations is within five miles of another station. Knapp countered that parking lots at many of those stations fill up.

Some MARC riders, including John King, who has been riding MARC from Boyds to the District for two decades, are starting to think about their options.

"I live alongside I-270 and used to watch the traffic jams and laugh at everyone out there and pat myself on the back," King said. "This is my payback. I won't be laughing anymore. I will be joining them."